

BESB CONSOLIDATION PROPOSAL - BILL #6380

Members of the Committee,

My name is Michelle Ward. I am here today to discuss the reasons why you should not separate BESB.

I have been using BESB services ever since I was three. I am 15 now, and the many branches of BESB have taught me many different things. From reading Braille, to crossing the street, to going to the mall on my own have been taught through mobility lessons and life skills camp that are set up through BESB. These everyday skills are to be learned by blind people if they want to live on their own.

There are two main camps that I would like to acknowledge today that made a huge difference to me, the Life Skills program and Camp Abilities. In Life Skills, I learned to do laundry, cook, and use public transportation. Camp Abilities on the other hand showed me how to play contact sports even though I have a visual impairment. In creating these one-on-one programs with similar kids like me, BESB has taught me how to do things independently.

BESB also has TVI'S (teacher of the visually impaired) that go out to teach blind children to read Braille, help teachers teach me, and provide books

and equipment that will make it easier for me to do my homework.

If you separate BESB into different sections, it will get harder and harder for the branches to talk and set up the children they take care of . Braille is also a very important factor in blind people's lives, and if BESB cannot send people out to teach them, there will be many children who will not be able to read. I have just started to learn Braille because the reality is my vision is getting worse and it scares me. If there was a problem getting a TVI to teach me Braille, the day that I would go blind would be the day that I would have to go back and be dependent on other people to read to me and help me navigate through unknown areas.

Please do not separate BESB. It would be a tragedy to see blind children not be able to be independent because BESB had a loss of communication and could not do the programs and navigational help that would teach those kids to be independent.
Thank you.

Michelle Ward

North Haven